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THE FOREIGN STUDENT: EXCHANGEE OR IMMIGRANT?

A DISCUSSION OF THE FOREIGN
STUDENT WHO TAKES UP PERMANENT
RESIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL INTERCHANGE POLICY
1 EAST 67TH STREET—AT FIFTH AVENUE—NEW YORK 21, N. Y.

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The Committee on Educational Interchange Policy was established by the Institute of International Education in 1954 in response to a recommendation made by an independent committee which studied the role and functions of the Institute. This group noted the need for a policy committee to survey the field of exchange, and recommended that the Institute create such a body. The Committee has been assigned responsibility for helping to:

1. Clarify the values of exchanges; set standards and provide objectives for exchange activities.
2. Identify problems and difficulties; find solutions.
3. Identify promising programs and bring them to the attention of interested groups.

Although established by the Institute, the Committee's responsibility is to study and report upon the whole area of exchange of persons, and not only those activities to which IIE itself is related. The Committee is served by a small secretariat in the Institute.

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The expectation that foreign students will return to their home countries is as old as the first student exchange programs. The very concept of "exchange", which originally involved a student in one country exchanging places with a student in another, implies return home. While the emphasis has shifted over the years, the basic thought has remained the same. The student who returns from study and travel abroad is a vital link between nations in a fragmented world. He brings back new and stimulating ideas, useful both to himself and to society, and helps strengthen bonds of friendship, so often strained by divergent national interests. Today we emphasize the role of the former foreign student in the social and economic development of his country, and in promoting mutual understanding between peoples and nations.

The vast majority of foreign students return home after a sojourn abroad, better prepared for their future careers, stimulated and broadened in outlook and more aware of the wide diversity of peoples and cultures in the world. Some, however, decide to stay abroad permanently. They find the new country to their liking, they find good jobs, better perhaps than they could find at home, and sometimes they marry a citizen of the country they are visiting. While the number who stay permanently is not large, educational institutions, U. S. and foreign government agencies and others sponsoring foreign students are concerned lest it increase and thus jeopardize the purposes of student exchange.

How Many Stay?

No one knows the precise number or nationality of foreign students who take up permanent residence in the United States. Neither U.S. immigration authorities, foreign embassies, nor existing rosters of foreign students can supply exact information. In the final analysis the immigration laws of the United States with their complicated quota systems determine whether a foreign visitor to this country can become a permanent resident.

In order to provide a rough statistical frame of reference for this discussion, a study was made of the records of four agencies which have long maintained exchange programs: the Belgian American Educational Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, the Institute of International Education and the Rockefeller Foundation. These organizations have kept in touch with a substantial part of their former foreign grantees over a period of about thirty years. While the information derived from records of these organizations is not necessarily conclusive for all foreign students, it does give a reliable figure for four important groups. The experience of at least one major U. S. educational institution (University of Michigan) supports, in general, the study based on the four organizations described here.

Two limitations should be kept in mind, however, in projecting figures presented here to other groups: a) The former foreign grantees of the four organizations cited in this study represent a wide range of academic levels, from undergraduates to advanced research scholars,¹ and b) the proportion of former foreign grantees now resident in the United States includes both those who took up residence immediately after

¹ It is significant that despite the differences in academic level, data for all organizations were similar.

concluding their studies, and those who returned to the United States at a later date. It seems worthwhile to describe the findings of the study despite these limitations, since they represent the only concrete data available.

Analysis of the alumni directories and record cards of the Belgian American Educational Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, the Institute of International Education and the Rockefeller Foundation, reveals that 9% of 10,598 former foreign grantees of all nationalities who studied in the United States over a period of approximately thirty years, are now permanent residents of the United States (Table 1). The total

TABLE 1
FORMER FOREIGN GRANTEES RESIDING PERMANENTLY IN
THE UNITED STATES: EXPERIENCE OF FOUR ORGANIZATIONS

Organization ¹	Years on Whom Information Available ²	Grantees	Number Residing Permanently in the U.S. ³	Per cent Residing Permanently in the U.S.
Belgian American Educational Foundation	1920-1950	650	53	8%
Commonwealth Fund	1925-1954	729	50	7%
Institute of International Education	1925-1953	6,394	617	10%
Rockefeller Foundation	1917-1950	2,825	209	7%
Total former Foreign Grantees	10,598	929	9%	

¹ The types of persons sponsored by the four organizations differed. The BAEF and the Commonwealth Fund assisted chiefly advanced graduate students and leaders. The IIE assisted chiefly graduate and undergraduate students, plus some specialists and leaders. The Rockefeller Foundation assisted chiefly advanced graduate students, research fellows and scholars.

² Information was available on about half the former foreign grantees of IIE and substantially all those of the other three organizations.

³ Although every effort was made to eliminate temporary residents, a few are undoubtedly included in these figures. The Belgian American Educational Foundation believes that permanent residents among their former foreign grantees number about 5%.

number of foreign-born persons in the U. S. population as a whole is about 7%. Only a small fraction of the former foreign grantees taking up permanent residence did not first return home. This is probably due to the fact that until 1952, U. S. immigration laws made it almost impossible for aliens to become permanent residents without leaving the country and returning. None of the organizations reports that the number of former grantees taking up residence is increasing. The Commonwealth Fund writes in the introduction to its 1955 directory:

"The fellows are finding their careers principally in the countries from which they came to the fellowships, and in general their geographic dispersion appears to follow normal expectations. Although an increasing number of British Fellows is returning to visit America on professional missions, the number taking residence in the United States has not increased appreciably since the last directory in 1950".²

If we analyze in greater detail the experience of the two organizations having world-wide program, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Institute of International Education (Table 2), it is apparent that there are significant differences among scholars and students who come from different areas of the world. While the number of former grantees immigrating from some areas is too small to draw firm conclusions, it can be said that the combined figures show a high proportion of Europeans residing here permanently (12%) and a low proportion of grantees from the Far East (2.3%). Other areas fall between. The Near East shows the third highest proportion of grantees residing here permanently (9.3%).

In addition to area of origin, field of study may be a factor in foreign student immigration. In at least one specialized field,

² Commonwealth Fund Directory, 1955, p. XI.

TABLE 2

FORMER FOREIGN GRANTEES OF THE ROCKEFELLER
FOUNDATION AND IIE RESIDING PERMANENTLY IN THE
UNITED STATES, BY AREA OF ORIGIN

Area	Total Grantees Who Studied in U.S. on Whom Information Available ¹	Number Re- siding in the U.S.	Per cent Residing in the U.S.
Africa	57	3	5.3%
Canada	195	9	4.6%
Europe	5,467	654	12.0%
Far East	1,618	37	2.3%
Latin America	1,542	91	5.9%
Near East	205	19	9.3%
Oceania	135	13	9.6%
Total	9,219	826	9.0%

¹ Information was available on approximately 60% of the Institute alumni from Europe, Oceania, and the Far East, but only about 30% of those from Africa and Latin America, and about 40% from the Near East.

medicine, the number of students immigrating is probably higher than average. Although correspondence with exchange organizations in the medical field and a survey of hospitals having exchange visitor programs produces no conclusive evidence on this point, the conviction among medical groups that exchange doctors stay here in greater than average numbers, cannot be ignored.

In any discussion of foreign student immigration, the related question of prolonged study in the United States on the part of students who intend to return home eventually must also be considered. Since prolonged study is sometimes misinterpreted as immigration, and may tend to alienate the student from his homeland, it is relevant to examine data on length of stay. How many foreign students, for example, remain in the United States longer than three years, considered by most sponsors of exchange programs to be an optimum

period? On this point certain data are available.³ The majority of foreign students study for two years. Not quite a third study three years or longer. About 10% study five years or longer. These figures represent an average for all nationalities. Among students from different countries there is considerable variation. This can be seen by comparing selected nationalities with respect to length of study period (Table 3). Of the Nigerian students here in 1956-57, 61% had been studying for

TABLE 3

PER CENT OF STUDENTS FROM SELECTED COUNTRIES STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES THREE OR MORE YEARS¹

Country	Per cent of Students Studying Three Years or Longer
Nigeria	61%
Jordan	55%
Iraq	43%
Israel	39%
Greece	36%
Venezuela	35%
Iran	35%
Jamaica	33%
Japan	31%
Egypt	29%
India	28%
Philippines	24%
Brazil	23%
Ghana	22%
Pakistan	21%
Ireland	20%
Germany	17%
United Kingdom	15%
Belgium	13%
France	9%
Sweden	6%

¹ Derived from data published in *Open Doors* 1957, Institute of International Education, New York, June 1957.

³ Barbara J. Walton and Sylvia S. Leavy, "How Long Do Foreign Students Study in the United States?", *News Bulletin*, Institute of International Education, April 1958, page 21.

three years or longer, as compared with 35% of the Iranians and only 6% of the Swedes.

The reasons for such widely different lengths of study are many. Some countries do not at present have adequate educational facilities to provide advanced, or even undergraduate, educational opportunities for all those who qualify. Some must send a certain proportion of their students abroad each year for a good part of the education and training that other countries are able to provide at home. The high cost of travel to the United States and the great social and economic value of a university degree, also compel some foreign students to make the most of a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity.

There appears to be little relationship between the tendency of students from some areas of the world to study for three or more years, and their tendency to immigrate. A comparison of major world areas in this respect is presented in Table 4. On the one hand it may be seen that while the

TABLE 4
PROPORTION OF STUDENTS FROM MAJOR WORLD AREAS
STUDYING THREE YEARS OR LONGER COMPARED WITH
PROPORTION STAYING PERMANENTLY

Major World Area	Proportion of 1956-57 Students Studying Three Years or Longer ¹	Proportion of Students Staying Permanently ²
Africa	33.9%	5.3%
Canada	30.7	4.6
Europe	19.8	12.0
Far East	30.1	2.3
Latin America . . .	28.2	5.9
Near East	35.5	9.3
Oceania	21.5	9.6

¹ Derived from data published in *Open Doors* 1957, Institute of International Education, New York, June 1957.

² Combined former foreign grantees of the Rockefeller Foundation (1917-1950) and the Institute of International Education (1925-1953).

European group contains the smallest proportion of students studying three years or longer, it also contains the largest proportion of permanent residents. On the other hand, while African students prolong their stay, they are apparently unlikely to immigrate. Students from the Near East offer little contrast in this respect, seeming to both prolong their studies and to immigrate. These conclusions are consistent in general with the experience of exchange organizations, and with the restrictions imposed by U. S. immigration laws.

The Viewpoint of Sponsors

The U. S. Government is especially interested in having foreign students return home. The Department of State alone awarded grants to some 4,000 foreign students, leaders and specialists in the one year 1956. U. S. Government agencies believe that two basic objectives of the exchange program are frustrated when students immigrate to the United States. These are the opportunity to promote international amity, which is considered the primary purpose of educational exchange, and the opportunity to help other countries achieve social and economic progress, which is also considered an important goal. President Eisenhower stated the Government's position clearly in a 1955 message to the Senate:

"All of the exchange programs are founded upon good faith. We can maintain them as effective instruments for promoting international understanding and good will only if we insist that the participants honor their commitments to observe the conditions of the exchange in the same way that they expect the United States to honor its obligations to them. On the one hand, exchange aliens must return to the country from which they came. On the other hand, the United States

must not permit either immediate re-entry or other evasion of the return rule. Otherwise, the countries from which our exchange visitors come will realize little or no benefit from the training and experience received in the U. S., and we shall fail to promote good will toward, and better understanding of, our way of life. . . .”⁴

The force of law was put behind this point of view in 1956 when Congress, at the request of the President and the Department of State, passed Public Law 555 providing that all those holding “exchange visitor visas” under the U. S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (Smith-Mundt Act) must leave the United States and reside in a “cooperating country” (usually meaning home country) for at least two years before they may apply for permission to immigrate. About 15% of the foreign student population in the United States in 1956-57 held exchange visitor visas.⁵ Of these about half were here under government-sponsored exchange programs. The rest were sponsored by colleges, universities and private organizations. The other 85% of students, most of whom hold regular student visas, are not subject to Public Law 555, and can change to permanent residence status if they qualify in other respects without leaving the country. It should be noted also that Public Law 555 is a unilateral amendment to an act setting up a unilateral U. S. Government exchange program. It is not part of a bilateral agreement with a foreign government or governments.

Other nations are also concerned about students who take up permanent residence in the United States. Foreign governments support about 2,000 or 5% of the foreign students in

⁴ Excerpt from the President’s message to the Senate, 84th Congress, 1st session (Department of State Bulletin, July 11, 1955 “Exchangee denied Permanent Residence Immigration Status”).

⁵ Barbara J. Walton and Sylvia S. Leavy, *op. cit.*, page 22.

the United States, and play a part in the selection of many students supported by private and U. S. Government grants. The degree of concern felt by foreign governments varies greatly in different countries. It is one thing for countries with a shortage of trained and educated persons to lose students, and quite another for countries which are traditional exporters of skilled persons. European countries with a "laissez-faire" attitude toward their students and an interest in spreading their influence in the United States, are inclined to think of the gain as well as the loss when their students remain here. The greatest concern is probably felt by countries having large economic development programs at a stage where trained people are badly needed. This is not the case with all of the less-developed countries, some of which suffer from a surplus of "unemployed intellectuals".

Foreign governments in many cases take steps to see that their students return. The Korean Government has recently ordered all students who have finished their studies to return at once or face "legal action". Some countries require students to put up a bond equal to the amount of the fellowship as a guarantee of return. Others elicit a pledge of three or more years of service upon completion of studies. In Iran, according to a recent traveler,⁶ the Minister of Education plans to set up a high-level Commission to counsel all students going abroad. The Commission would advise students in fields in which trained people are needed, keep in touch with them after they go abroad, and make plans for their employment when they return. Several foreign governments actively recruit employees among their foreign student nationals in the United States, and provide them with financial assistance to return home where this is needed.

⁶ Ivan Putman Jr., *Educational Observations in the Middle East*, American Friends of the Middle East, page 15.

With some exceptions,⁷ educational institutions, foundations and private organizations, which together are responsible for about a fourth of the foreign students in the United States, are least likely to be concerned about foreign students who take up permanent residence in the United States. Educational institutions in particular tend to think first of the individual: his needs, capacities and accomplishments. The university typically looks for a student who will make good use of his abilities and training regardless of country of origin or ultimate residence. Return home is encouraged where foreign students are concerned, but this is not a major objective of the university.

Why Do Students Immigrate?

We are living in a changing world. Mobility is increasing. People are no longer as likely to stay fixed in the towns and villages where they were born. They look beyond local and even national boundaries for a better and happier life. A survey in Great Britain in the early part of 1957 indicated that almost half of the 5,183 male undergraduates in their last two years of study at Cambridge University were seriously considering emigration. Over 10% had definitely decided to leave Great Britain permanently. A similar situation has prevailed in countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands for many years with the consent and even encouragement of their respective governments. It is against this background that any tendency on the part of former exchange students to take up permanent residence in the United States must be considered.

Students remain abroad, or return there to live, for reasons that may be personal, professional or political. Personal rea-

⁷ Foundations sponsoring technical assistance projects may be exceptions.

sions may have little to do with the two countries involved. Students may have made friends and formed personal ties in their adopted countries; they may seek opportunities to earn a good living, or may seek escape from unpleasant responsibilities at home. They may stay because of the professional opportunities available. Some are trained for work in a highly specialized field not available at home and want to keep up to date on the latest developments. Some respond to the initiative of potential employers who urge qualified foreign students in fields where their skills are needed to remain permanently.

Real or imagined difficulties at home act as a strong incentive for some students to remain in or return to the United States, especially those students from less-developed countries. While most foreign students probably do not worry about returning home as much as Americans think they do, a substantial number expect to face real problems. They must re-establish their position in a society that is sceptical of foreign influences and ideas, and they must find a job in which their training will be utilized. Many countries need trained men and women, but not all of these countries have yet found ways of using them efficiently. The Useems,⁸ for example, report that many returned Indian students waited an average of a year before securing a permanent job. Fewer than 10% were able to find employment in their chosen field. One in four of the younger group of Indians interviewed considered leaving India to look for employment elsewhere at some time after their return. Thus the situation at home acts as a spur to many who decide to immigrate to the United States.

Quite a different reason for the immigration of some students is the political situation at home. For some it may be unwise or even dangerous to return. A revolution may have

⁸ John and Ruth Hill Useem, *The Western Educated Man in India*, Dryden Press, 1955.

occurred, either in their own outlook or that of their government. Their thinking may now be seriously out of step with attitudes at home. A highly publicized example is that of the Chinese students in the United States in 1949, when the Chinese Communists took over the mainland of China. Of the 4,000 Chinese students enrolled in U. S. educational institutions at that time, more than two-thirds remained in the United States. German and Austrian exchange students, among others, became refugees in large numbers during the Nazi period, as did Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and other East Europeans during the early post-war period when Communist regimes came to power. Students from Latin America have occasionally sought asylum also.

A Point of View

The "round-trip" aspect of foreign study is an integral part of the total experience. Return home completes a normal cycle and brings the exchange experience to a logical conclusion. The sponsored or subsidized foreign student especially has an obligation to return home. He is part of a movement having certain defined objectives. He has committed himself to these objectives in accepting a grant or fellowship. Almost all fellowship terms imply, if they do not state explicitly, that the student shall return home promptly upon completion of his studies. The student knows in advance that he is bound by this condition. He is expected to seek other means of support if he plans to stay in the United States permanently.

A "one-way" exchange experience can be considered only a partial success. The knowledge that a student acquires may benefit himself and his host country, but it will not usually reach his home country. The insights he has developed into the ways of another people may broaden his own perspective, but not that of his family and friends. Both the loss of an oppor-

tunity to see beyond narrow national boundaries, and the loss of a trained person may be serious matters in some areas of the world. The U. S. Government and foreign governments are understandably concerned that this loss should be kept to a minimum.

It must be recognized, however, that the original plans and purposes of the exchange student, and even his national allegiance, may well undergo a change during the course of his study experience. This is inherent in the learning process. Thus a certain loss, if loss it is, is likely to occur in any fellowship program. This is a lesson learned many times over during World War II when the U. S. Government set up fellowship programs to train specialists, and found that it could count on a predictable number using their knowledge outside government service. The risk of "losing" some students may be considered the price that must be paid for substantial benefits to others.

Taking a more positive view, it may be argued that foreign student immigration to the United States is not a loss at all. Certain different but valuable objectives are achieved by the foreign student who does not return home. He may have acquired knowledge that will make him a wiser and better person. He may play a useful role in society, even though it is not the role envisaged by his sponsor or his home country. He may follow scholarly and scientific pursuits which will eventually benefit many countries. Examples of the fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas across national boundaries are too numerous to cite. To the extent that exchange programs are dedicated to furthering a world reservoir of knowledge, it is irrelevant whether the exchange student returns to his country of origin. Knowledge knows no nationality.

The student who immigrates may even help to promote international amity and good-will. By maintaining ties with

his former homeland, he may contribute to greater understanding of the United States abroad. By interpreting his country of origin in the United States and providing a source of first-hand information, he may deepen American insight into the ways of his country. Indeed the opportunity to contribute to American understanding grows as the duration of the student's sojourn increases. And surely the benefit Americans derive from gaining an insight into foreign ways is no less vital than the benefit other countries derive from coming to understand America.⁹

It is not self-evident, finally, that from a purely United States point of view the "public interest" requires exchange students to return home. Even among executive agencies of the government there are differing points of view. It may be a net gain for the United States when certain students stay here. While the government should of course be prepared to cooperate with foreign countries which seek to persuade their nationals to return home, it should also accept the fact that some exchangees will become immigrants. We should recognize the contribution their talents and energies can make to our country.

What Can Be Done to Encourage Return Home?

Administrators of exchange programs, whether U. S. or foreign, can take certain steps to increase the likelihood that exchange students will return home. Where return home is a major objective this should be taken into account in the selection process. If the nature of the program permits, only those should be selected who already have a stake in their home

⁹ "Perhaps it would not be unreasonable to observe that both parties are eager to be understood, and that currently both may be more eager to be understood than to understand. . .", John and Ruth H. Useem, *Op. Cit.*

country, who are part of an on-going development project or who are employed in some useful and vital work at home. Or, if more appropriate to the aims of the program, graduate students can be chosen in fields of study which appear to be related to needs and opportunities in the home country. In either case indications of psychological roots in the homeland should be important criteria. Recent studies of Japanese and Mexican students indicate that those lacking strong identification with their home country are most likely to become alienated.

Once the student has been selected and arrives in the United States, program administrators can encourage the student to keep in touch with developments at home, to speak to American community groups about his home country, and perhaps to look at his training with an eye to its usefulness at home. Close cooperation should be maintained with foreign embassy officials who may be trying to keep in touch with exchange students, and with groups such as the American Friends of the Middle East, which try to assist students in finding jobs at home. By means of "terminal orientation" students can be helped to analyze the problems they may find at home and encouraged to discuss them with fellow students and area experts. Through skillful counseling, finally, the American administrator can encourage the student to consider all factors in his situation before reaching a decision to remain here permanently.

Further than this, however, there is relatively little that an American administrator can or should do. Foreign governments and sponsors are in a much stronger position to ensure return home. They can offer inducements that an American administrator cannot. They are better acquainted with the situation in the student's home country. They are more likely to be in touch with national needs and economic development

projects that may be under way. Some of the specific steps being taken by foreign governments to induce their students to return home are described in an earlier section. If action is necessary in this area, it is ordinarily most effective and most appropriate where taken by representatives of the student's own country.

Whether taken by American administrators or foreign representatives, however, steps taken to increase the likelihood that exchange students will return home entail certain sacrifices and will not be successful in all cases. A program limited to graduate students or professional persons must sacrifice certain advantages of an undergraduate program. Limiting fields of study to those "needed" by home countries may rule out the long-term benefits resulting from more fundamental subjects which seem less useful. Setting up selection criteria which favor socially motivated students may eliminate individualistic students who might gain from, and contribute to, an exchange program.

Finally many students will dislike the idea of being regulated and will not respond to attempts to reorient them and send them home at an early date. They will prefer to immerse themselves in the host society and culture, to forget their homelands for a time while they absorb new ways of thinking and feeling, and even to remain until they obtain several degrees. This too is a legitimate and time-honored pattern of foreign study. The infinite variety of human motives and purposes makes it unlikely that uniformity of behavior even in the area of returning home, will be fully achieved despite the most careful planning. In the final analysis a student's decision to seek his fortune abroad involves his future life and happiness, and should in the main be left up to the individual.

Other statements in this series by the Committee on Educational Interchange Policy:

The Goals of Student Exchange. An analysis of goals of programs for foreign students. January 1955.

Geographic Distribution in Exchange Programs. A study of geographic considerations in the selection and placement of U.S. Government-sponsored exchange students. January 1956.

Chinese Students in the United States, 1948-55. A study in government policy. March 1956.

Orientation of Foreign Students. Signposts for the cultural maze. June 1956.

Expanding University Enrollments and the Foreign Student. A case for foreign students at U.S. colleges and universities. February 1957.

Hungarian Refugee Students and United States Colleges and Universities. A progress report on the emergency program to aid Hungarian students in the U.S. March 1957.

United States Medical Training for Foreign Students and Physicians. A discussion of the problems of the education and training of foreign medical personnel in the United States. July 1957.

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